

FROM DANTE TO SAINT CATHERINE

Romans rose in tumult and established a popular government." " The ancient people and government of Rome," writes Matteo, ".was to all the world a mirror of constancy and incredible firmness, of upright and regulated living, and of every moral virtue. But those who at present possess the ruins of that famous city are, on the contrary, utterly fickle and inconstant, and without any shadow of moral virtues. With eager and excessive lightness, they often overturn their state, and, seeking liberty, they have found it, but have not known how to set it in order nor how to keep it."¹ The absence of the Popes, while weakening the power of the nobles, gave a fresh impulse of life to the Republic, whose rights had been formally recognized by Clement V in 1310. Revolution after revolution followed, until in May, 1347, the humanist Cola di Rienzo, full of poetical and unpractical dreams of Rome's past, established " the Good Estate," declaring the cause of Rome that of the whole of Italy, and calling upon the Italian States to free themselves from their tyrants and to send representatives to a national parliament. The scheme fell to nothing, through the disposition of the times and the unworthi-ness of the man who proposed it. Rienzi fled in December, and passed more than two years of mystical contemplation among the Fraticelli in the Abruzzi. An epoch of anarchy followed—scarcely abating during the Jubilee of 1350, when, finding themselves insulted and threatened, the papal legates put the city under an interdict. Sent by the Emperor as a prisoner to Avignon, Rienzi was reconciled to Innocent VI, and returned to Italy in the autumn of 1353, as the Pope's representative, to collaborate with the great Spanish cardinal in building up the fabric of the Church's temporal power—only to meet a shameful death on the steps of the Capitol.

" The Capitol was yet stained with the blood of Rienzi," writes Gibbon, "when Charles the Fourth descended from the Alps to obtain the Italian and Imperial crowns." For a while,

¹ M. Villani, *ix.* 87. For these changes and counter-changes, see the admirable essay by Pasquale Villari, // *comune di Roma nel medio evo*, in *Saggi storici e critici*, Bologna, 1890.